

PARTISAN DEFENCE COMMITTEE

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!



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Pakistan jails human rights activists for tweets

Free Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha now!

A Pakistani court on 24 January sentenced Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha, prominent human rights lawyers, to 17 years in prison for social media posts critical of Pakistan's military. The sentencing took place in the absence of both defendants and their lawyers. The couple are accused of cyber terrorism and intentionally disseminating false information under the draconian Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act. Mazari, who is pregnant, was manhandled by police officers and denied adequate food in custody. She has attracted the fury of the government for defending the most marginalised, taking on cases of enforced disappearances of Baloch activists and daring to represent those accused of blasphemy, a highly incendiary charge in Pakistan.

The conviction of Mazari and Chattha is part of a wider crackdown by the state against all critics and those defending basic democratic rights in a country moving towards even more authoritarianism. This crackdown started with the Sharif-Bhutto government throwing former Prime Minister Imran Khan behind bars at the behest of the U.S. Recent months have seen the imprisonment of activists from Gilgit-Baltistan and members of leftist parties that have been raising peoples' issues. Its vengeance against all opponents recently crossed international borders when a former cabinet minister of Imran Khan's government, Mirza Shahzad Akbar, was targeted at his home in England, in a series of attacks starting on Christmas Eve. Another Pakistani dissident sympathetic to Imran Khan and living in England has also been targeted.

This government and military cannot tolerate any dissent because they fear it could light a spark which would threaten the precarious social stability of the country. But the social tinder in society will continue to accumulate as the economy weakens, and man-made and natural disasters (such as the fire in Karachi's Gul Plaza and the recent severe snowstorm in Tirah Valley) make life ever more difficult for ordinary people, all while the government makes military deals with Saudi Arabia. These conditions will continue to give rise to more Mazaris and Chatthas. There is a need to build a movement to free Imaan, Hadi, and all other anti-government activists languishing in prison. This fight must be directed not only against the Pakistani military state, but against the imperialists that wine and dine the corrupt military generals as well.

Free Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali Chattha now! Drop all charges! Free all political prisoners!

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